



# USING HIGH-TEST GAS? ARE YOU SURE?

## Legislators think Ohio should confirm octane ratings, purity

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### THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

When Ohio drivers push that button for premium gasoline, they can only assume that the high-octane, high-priced stuff is actually pumping into their gas tanks.

Unlike 46 other states, Ohio doesn't give anyone at the state or local level the authority to check whether the gas coming out of the pump meets the advertised octane ratings, or if filters are working to keep water and sediment out of the fuel.

"When you pump that 93 octane gas into your car, you have no way of knowing if it's 93, 92 or 87," said Rep. William J. Healy II, D-Canton. "We need to make sure consumers are getting what they paid for."

Healy wants to give county auditors the authority to test gasoline at the pumps to ensure that the octane ratings are as advertised and to check for water or sediment that could damage engines.

Ohio, Pennsylvania, Alaska and Nevada are the only states that do not authorize gasoline testing.

"I think many Ohioans think we're doing this already," said Rep. Jon M. Peterson, a Delaware Republican and former county auditor. "We need to catch up with those 46 other states."

Under the unusual bipartisan bill, a county auditor — who already is required to check that a pump is distributing the proper amount of fuel — can use new state standards for the gasoline.

The octane rating measures the fuel's ability to withstand premature ignition. Fuel that bursts into flames too easily causes engine knock. Cars equipped with higher-compression engines need higher-octane gasoline to run smoothly. The average engine runs best on regular gasoline.

If the fuel is off by more than one octane point, based on readings from a portable tester and allowing for a second test if requested by a station owner, a warning is given.

Subsequent test failures would result in fines starting at \$250, up to \$1,000 for a fourth offense. Failed tests would be made public, Healy said.

Healy said he's heard of situations where station owners will ask a delivery driver to put a lower-octane gas into the premium tank.

There is no penalty in the proposal concerning water and sediment — a decision made after negotiations with the oil and gas industry. Healy said filters usually take care of those problems before they reach a vehicle's tank.

Summit County, Ohio's only county with a charter form of government, is the only place where the auditor has the authority to check gasoline quality.

Franklin County Auditor Joe **Testa** said he also has been testing fuel quality about 3,000 times a year since 2001, though he has no authority to do so and can't take action if the fuel fails to meet the proper octane level.

Failure rates the first year hit 15 percent, **Testa** said. Since then, the rates have fallen to 3 percent to 5 percent a year.

Though he can't do anything except inform station owners of the results, **Testa** said, he has compiled plenty of data to show state lawmakers that this is a problem that should be addressed.

Under the bill, counties that choose to do the tests also must pay for them. **Testa** said the cost is minimal because auditors already are checking the pumps.

"Station owners generally appreciate that we are verifying their octane levels," **Testa** said. "For the most part, merchants want to treat customers fairly as well."

But Jennifer Rhoads, general counsel for the Ohio Petroleum Marketers and Convenience Store Association, said there are already fuel-testing requirements at the federal level, and many companies do their own quality checks.

"I think this adds an unnecessary level of testing," she said.

Rhoads said the association disputes the accuracy of the portable testing device called for in the bill, and calls flawed a 1999 study by the Ohio Department of Agriculture that found a failure rate of higher than 12 percent in sample gasoline testing across the state.

"The high overall failure rate compared to failure rates of states that have strong fuel-quality regulatory programs is a concern," Agriculture Director Fred L. Dailey wrote at the time.

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**Illustration:** Photo appeared in newspaper, not in the archive.

**Photo caption:** BEN MARGOT